

## MONTANA STATE PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: August 28, 2013

**Agenda Item**: Proposed Acquisition of Easement with DNRC at Thompson Falls State Park

**Division:** Parks

**Action Needed:** Approval to pursue an easement from DNRC on the Thompson Falls State Park site

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

**Background**: Thompson Falls State Park is a 36.4 acre Department of Natural Resources Conservation (DNRC) property located on the Lower Clark Fork River one mile from the town of Thompson Falls, and has been a state park since 1960. Annual visitation has more than doubled over the past five years, with the park recording 11,856 visits between May and October of 2012. Montana State Parks has historically managed the property under an annual land use license with DNRC. The annual license fee is based on 3.5% of the appraised value, plus an additional 2% per year fee increase. The property is reappraised every five years. The annual license fee is \$12,663 in 2013 and has become an increasingly challenging expense for Montana State Parks to fund. Thompson Falls State Park lies within the Avista Utilities Company Clark Fork Settlement Project and receives annual operations and maintenance funding, however in 2007 Avista Utilities discontinued contributing to the annual license fee payment. Avista has expressed interest in partnering with Montana State Parks to explore the purchase of an easement on the property to ensure its continuation as a state park.

**Public Involvement Process & Results**: This action is proposed, so formal scoping has not been initiated yet. However, the Parks Division explored this idea previously in 2006, and public sentiment at that time was favorable.

## **Alternatives and Analysis:**

**Alternative 1:** Pursue an easement from DNRC to ensure long-term management in the state park system. This alternative would eliminate the annual land use license payment, thus improving the long term viability of the park. In 2006 the appraised value of the property was \$499,000. It is not known what the appraised value would be in 2013, but the cost is expected to be a challenge for the state park system to meet. The impact could be softened considerably through a contribution from Avista Utilities if a proposal is approved by the Clark Fork Settlement Recreation Subgroup. This body has also expressed strong support for providing additional infrastructural improvement funding beyond the annual operations and maintenance funding if and when the site is secure through easement.

**Alternative 2:** Montana State Parks would continue paying the annual land use license payment to DNRC. This action is less than desirable due to increasing annual costs and lack of a long term solution.

**Agency Recommendation & Rationale:** State Parks recommends engaging in discussions with DNRC to secure an easement to ensure that these lands are maintained as part of the Montana State Park system for future generations.

**Proposed Motion:** I move to direct the department to enter into dialogue with DNRC to secure the park lands for the benefit of park visitors.